



# 21 Years of the Town is the Venue

## *Planning the coming of Age*

How old are we? 19, 20, maybe? Tessa: you should do something. Fine, we might, we will, need to check, Jesus!, already 21, in December, 1995, we got the charity status, crickey, 21 then, no more a teenager, but grown up, need also to behave like that, need also to celebrate, she says, ok, lets do that, but how? The town is the venue, that is what it is, it will always be, the summer passes, the autumn comes, shall we, shall we not. Lets do it, says Joss. Lets do it, says Louise. Ok, lets do it, lets just do it. What about all the artists, how can we have them? Here, at the party? Make a film, with all of them, they need to be there, all of them, or as many as we can, at least. Need a concept, what's the concept? It's the town is the venue of course. Need a vision, a visualised vision. Need to talk to Jaak, he understands, need to see him, go to Cape, must be. He finds a residency, in a vineyard. Good start, think, talk, swim, eat, walk, think, talk, swim, walk, eat, ... team, in the mean, all working ahead, the butcher, the baker, all roped in, also our candlestick makers, but what is it? That is different? That we like? What is it? Isn't it obvious? The town is the venue, the ARTocracy? The New Economies, the artists, the people here, the projects, the books, its all of that, needs to get all under one roof. Filming artists. Alec Findlay, first one, Baudouin, bonjour, Priya, India, namaste, Debbie/Daisy, no sound, love you all, miss you all, come back, in flesh, please. Sophie, stitches them all together. Superstar. She is.

The pamphlet, green, red, brown, coming together. But what about ARTPOWER, right, but just not right, here, not us. ACT LOCAL, the wee globe around the wee town, the people strung together in a circle. Jaak!! Every word crafted, every word turned upside down, spun around, placed like a giant puzzle. It must fit. In the end. The people, they can still take the pieces out, then fit them back or replace. The day comes nearer. Rachael, Sophie, Linda, Anna, Joss, exhibition, walking lunch, BANK, bookshop, market, guests, here, there everywhere, all coming. Children too, mine and others. David Harding, arrives, I am not there, at the station, who to blame? The day is there, we are all there, at the market, Caroline, Caravaners, Jaak with his signs, Anthony, Stuart, the office, tidy, the staff, the stuff, stuffed in drawers, the photographer, Elisabetta, Camilla, Catrin, the list, is long.

*Claudia Zeiske, Director Deveron Projects*

## ***How do you organise a birthday party for an organisation that is turning 21?***

Well, for a long time we were not very sure. After much deliberation and conceptual wrestling — amongst the team and many of the board members — the constellation of ideas began to crystalise into the rough outline of a plan. At least enough of one to begin planning. This was to be a celebration of the combined effort of 21 years of artists, interns, directors, project managers, funders, oh and of course the town and its inhabitants. Better not forget them eh.

We were already on the back foot though: “Not many of our previous artists, thinkers and writers in residence will be able to make it”, we said. We were wrong. “No problem, the Stewart’s Hall can comfortably cater for 300 guests”. Aye, well the panto has had it booked in advance for the last 10 years. Shite.

Of course we did not panic. The team is well trained in dealing with adverse conditions, simultaneous failures in both plan A and B. We moved on, new venues located; plans adapted. The guest list continued to grow and the day grew nearer.

Many to do lists were written, ignored and new ones written in their place; many staff meetings were held; jobs allocated; venues booked and unbooked; volunteers sought and found; new equipment bought, old equipment lost; photographer booked and briefed; mountains of cardboard piled high in the basement, full of potential; site visits conducted and hosts reassured; caterers cancelled, last minute alternatives found; risk assessments written and recorded; all the appropriate authorities informed, of course; giant chalkboards written with maps, diagrams, times and venues; documents compiled, printed and stapled; badges made and remade; late nights and early mornings. Pay attention to the task list and everything will be OK.

The day arrived and disappeared in a flash. The reason for doing what we do, remembered.

A small ford fiesta stuffed with everything essential for a birthday party, hardly space for a driver — it drove on autopilot most of the day — returned safely.

Switch of heaters  
Lock offices  
Lock middle door  
Switch off lights  
Breathe out.

*Joss Allen, Project Manager, Deveron Projects*

# The Brander Building

## *International Skype Reunions*

In the office next to Hilda's cupboard a laptop was open on the desk and there appeared to be a Skype call going on. A collection of Skype recordings between Claudia (founder and Director of Deveron Arts, and also my mum) and over 70 artists that she had invited from around the world to work in Huntly over the past 21 years played on loop. Everyone has different artists and projects that stick in their mind- the Skype recordings served a trip down memory lane as every 2 minutes a new smiling artist's face appeared on the screen and one rapidly remembers the quirky, challenging or beautiful impression they made during their time here. Many of them are laughing about their favourite and lasting memories at Deveron Arts, some of them show souvenirs they have treasured to the camera and others perform their musical talents for Claudia through the webcam.

I have my own fondness for these people who were part of my upbringing in Huntly. It's impossible not to smile or share your own memories of these artists and their projects and the cultural exchange they offered. David and his taxidermy sheep; Clea and Paul who are now our neighbours; Senzeni Marasela who invited a real life Barbie woman to join a panel discussion; Mihret Kebede from Ethiopia whose legacy is the Slow Marathon and who was scared of ghosts in Huntly; the Utopia group artists who I met in Beijing with Claudia during her research trip; Anthony who organised the best Father's Day ever, Yunior and Celia who tuned in separately from Scotland and Cuba; Jacques whose kids I babysat, Fabiana who taught me piano ... the list goes on.

*Rachel May, Participant*



## ***On Lure of the Lost, a film by Stuart Armitt and Anthony Schrag***

During Deveron Projects' (DP) twenty-first birthday celebrations, Anthony Schrag was invited to say a few words reflecting on his relationship with the organisation. He remarked that he had found in them, and in Claudia, something kindred - a home from home, an arts organisation where his style of working seemed a perfect fit. However, if this had helped his practice to flourish, he wryly noted, it was rather poetic that his last project with them, the Lure of the Lost walking pilgrimage from Huntly to the Venice Biennale in the summer of 2015, had more or less stopped it in its tracks. Only half-joking (I think) he said that he hadn't been able to make anything since.

When I watch Stuart Armitt's film of Lure of the Lost this claim is understandable. The film comprises material recorded by Stuart on a handful of visits he made along Anthony's journey, and an astonishingly abundant and candid collection of Anthony's self-documented footage. It charts only a fragment of the project, one colour in what Anthony has described as a tapestry of outputs. What the film presents to us, then, is not a full and unified document of Lure of the Lost, but a partial, though deeply personal account of the experience of walking 2,500 km, mostly alone. Two themes strike me most powerfully, both concern endurance: physical and emotional. The film conveys the convivial beginnings of the walk in the company of friends, family and supporters, and to some extent this feeling lingers, sporadically, throughout the UK. But by the time Anthony reaches France, the monotony and effort of walking eight hours a day is evident both in his voice and on his face, and in Stuart's editing: seemingly endless shots of roads, flat agrarian landscapes, lengthy silences, intense close-ups. Throughout, Anthony's recurring questioning of himself and of the project – its status as art, as pilgrimage, the centrality of Venice – illustrate the intellectual difficulty that can arise with three largely solitary and increasingly exhausting months to reflect on a project (especially coming smack bang on the tail of a practice-led, self-critiquing PhD). So much so that when he arrives in Venice, greeted on the other side of a busy freeway by colleagues, friends, and most poignantly of all, by his husband Ian, I experience, each time, a tangible sense of relief.

There are other moments too, though. The highs of reaching Dover, of crossing the Alps, of meeting companions, of hitching a lift in a shopping trolley, or in a horse drawn cart; the lows of sore feet, loneliness, loss, and getting lost.

'It's a life' after all, as Anthony reminds us, lived, for a time, on foot.

*Alan Macpherson, Artist*



## ***Walking Lunches***

Above the hubbub of Deveron Projects' office you could find Walking Lunches, an exhibition of Claudia Zeiske's ongoing project. Starting in 2009, Walking Lunches demonstrates the essence of Deveron Arts, now Deveron Projects. It combines walking, food and a meeting in a time-saving and more enjoyable way than each would be in isolation.



Over the years Claudia has had countless Walking Lunches with friends, family, curators, interns, staff, artists and more. They are documented through minutes and this is what formed the exhibition. Two rows of A4 sheets scatter the walls, pegged onto string as if on a washing line. This seemed to highlight the temporary nature of both the work, passing moments, conversations and lunches, as well as the exhibition itself, in the meeting room of the Brander Library. The minutes are formatted with small photographs taken by the participant and faint notes of the conversations they have shared. In contrary to the often unconventional Deveron Projects, the three images requested take the form of a portrait, landscape and still-life. Connecting Walking Art to more traditional forms of making.

As you walk around the room, these images capture the seasons, reflecting another significant influence on Deveron Projects. From the stark to the bleak, to snow and brilliant blue skies, these small seemingly delicate images capture the reality of the locale. Reflecting the daily experience of living and working within the town.

To me, Walking Lunches is a distilled representation of Deveron Projects, and it accurately demonstrates Claudia's own approach to art, curation and work. Combining walking, hospitality, food, relationships and art in such a simple concept clarifies what can sometimes feel like a disjointed and complex organisation. With Claudia providing the written agenda and the lunch, she sets up the framework for others creativity. To any artist who has worked at Deveron Projects this relationship will be all too familiar. Walking Lunches capture the nature of Claudia's collaborative approach and the ethos of her other project which spans 21 years and has been renamed appropriately.

*Sophie Lindsey, Shadow Curator Intern,  
Deveron Projects*



## Networks at No. 11

### *The Caravan Gallery at No.11*

Wallpaper is significant in the history of Deveron Arts. Inhabiting the old Caretaker's flat of the local library in Huntly, the garish 1960s wallpaper of the Brander Building kitchen has seen 21 years of engaging, challenging, charming and sometimes slightly odd creative projects.

Deveron Arts, now Deveron Projects, has taken on said garish pattern as mantle for its website and various other design features. When people visit Deveron Arts they are often surprised such magnitude exists IRL. It was therefore perfectly fitting that The Caravan Gallery's photographic prints should be hung not in a white cube, but in true venue-spirit on some brownish floral wallpaper.

11 Gordon Street is currently rented by mental health preventative care organisation, Networks of Wellbeing, who celebrate 25 years of work in the community this year. On 3 December they opened their doors as a coffee morning to compliment Deveron Art's 21st Birthday celebration. The Town is the Venue is a methodology that keeps Deveron Arts reactive and responsive to the specifics of space and context. Upon realisation that all white walls in no.11 were already in use, the feature floral wall was selected as gallery.

The Caravan Gallery is made up of Jan Williams and Chris Teasdale, a partnership who pride themselves on 'recording the reality and surreality of everyday life'. A2 prints of smuggled shortbread dough, community bookshop, Doric bench, tartan van, buttery butteries, Stewarts Hall heart and cricket wicket on brownish floral wallpaper made for a very Deveron Arts, very Caravan Gallery, very real life show during the event. O'Doherty cites the white wall as a 'battleground', but there is a democracy to be found in the supposed-clashing visuals of photographic surreality on wall-paper. We hope to work with this wall more in the future.

*Rachael Disbury, Art and Community Worker, Deveron Projects*

# Orbs Bookshop

## *Bookshop Talks*

On Deveron Street you will find an unexpected delight, a place where many hours are spent by the people of Huntly. As a result, it came as no surprise that Orbs Bookshop became a chosen venue for the Deveron Projects Birthday Celebrations. Surrounded by piles of books, four artists who hold Deveron Projects close to their heart, shared their stories of their time in Huntly.

First to begin was Stuart McAdam talking about his work *Lines Lost* 2013, that traced the route of the old railway line from Portsoy to Huntly. He identified the route by recalling thoughts from his journey. Examples included gaps in hedges, Zelda, dead sheep, alive sheep, scary cows, some old farm equipment and a distillery. If you want to get from Portsoy to Huntly then the obvious thing to do would be to drive, but would it be as much fun?

Forty minutes later, Ross Sinclair erupted from the crowd with his guitar. His family held the lyrics to the song 'The Real Life Gordons of Huntly History Song' and the music commenced. After the singing from the crowd subsided he discussed his contemporary examination of the ancestral home of the Clan Gordon, who appeared in Huntly after the Battle of Bannockburn.

Caroline Wendling was next to talk about her project *Oaks and Amity*, which culminated in the planting of the White Wood. Jake Williams sang a rendition of 'I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Solider' before Wendling had the audience entranced by her description of the legacy of the White Wood and the conversations, consultations and participatory events that occurred during the planting with over 150 members of the Huntly Community.

Chris Teasdale from The Caravan Gallery finished off the event by talking about the beginnings of the Caravan Gallery run by himself and Jan Williams. The 'silly little caravan' started as a portable gallery but people were more interested in their own stories and photographs so the caravan became a space for the public to take ownership. Their *Pride of Place* Project in Huntly, the *Room to Roam* Festival and *Aberdeenshire Ways* - a collaboration with Jacques Coetzer - were all fascinating projects that looked at the identity of towns in Aberdeenshire through the eyes of the locals.

Thank you to Orbs for hosting such a wonderful event, thank you to our speakers and thank you to everyone who came along!

*Anna Reid,  
Project Intern, Deveron Projects*





# The OAP Hall

## ***PRAKTIKA 2: Looking forward and outward***

*(Positioning the future of Socially Engaged Arts Practice in Scotland)*

The original Praktika was held 8 years ago, and was a 3-day workshop that looked to create a critical context for socially engaged art practice in a time where there was little reflective debate about the practice. It brought together twelve artists for a peer group discussion of their work in an environment of mutual trust, hospitality and critical analysis.

All momentous occasions offer a potential for reflection: We have come this far, and now what next? At 21, Deveron Arts has provided an incredible wealth of projects, theory, practice and institutional knowledge about socially engaged art and we wanted to look forward and outward to the future of this sort of practice in Scotland.

The Praktika II event was therefore framed as an intimate workshop with a small collection of invited guests; 5 artists, 5 researchers, 5 community members, 5 funders and 5 policy makers/governmental representatives. The ideas was to gather these 'experts in their fields' into groups to develop 'action plans' that might become practical frameworks for practice.



As a participant, organiser and regular critical-friend of Deveron Arts/Deveron Projects, the event had the Deveron hallmarks - good hosting, considered and contextualised framing, and a good balance between the 'art' and 'life.' For me, the site - the OAP Hall - was a poignant reminder of the 'real life' of people that would be impacted by this work. The hall was adorned with photos, crafts and the personalised touches of those that use the hall regularly. They were 'regular' towns folks and probably people



who were not interested in 'art', and as such they were on my mind throughout the event. They were the silent experts in the room.

The event began with a historical framing by Claudia, who presented a fictionalised history of a 'small Scottish town'. This provided the opportunity to look beyond Huntly and imagine 'any' Scottish town, and how socially engaged artworks might function in that context. We then proposed the 'Anthropocene' as a method for 'future retrospecting'. This is a way to think about 'now' by imagining the future and what we would like that future to be, and thinking about how we might get there. We then broke into groups to develop 5 'action points' that would help us get to this future. This was followed by a group discussion hosted by David Harding.

I am still processing all this information and unravelling all the brilliant and important ideas and suggestions that were put forward, but I think the salient notion that I left with was that it was a room filled with so many excellent thinkers that there was almost too many points: too many things to discuss; too many important issues that we would never solve or address. It was perhaps too much to suggest we might position the future of an entire practice for an entire nation within a 2 hour workshop.

However, this is not a bad thing - not at all!

What we came up with is more like the starting point for a longer, future conversation. It was an exercise in 'utopian dreaming' that is useful and important to have if we want to aim high.

It took 21 years to get to the position of strength that Deveron Arts/Projects now occupies; we can take some time to address these points appropriately and efficiently. We are now beyond our difficult insecure teenage years and have the confidence to approach them effectively, and this event was an excellent start to that important conversation.

Report on the findings to follow!

*Anthony Schrag,  
Artist*

## PRAKTIKA 2

PRAKTIKA 2's facilitator, the artist Anthony Schrag, asked participants to speculate on possible, probable and preferable futures for Deveron Projects. As it celebrates its 21st birthday, what might the next 21 years look like for the organisation? The charrette were hustled into small groups, plied with mint tea and home-made sausage rolls, and tasked with generating five action points within the space of just 30 minutes. Many of the participants' discussions began with a morbid and apocalyptic tone overshadowed by recent political events: notably the rise of fascism in the U.K. and USA. With the clock ticking inexorably toward the half-hour deadline, an arts congregation will, expectedly, proffer the arts as a potential bulwark against despotism and so, to some extent, expectations focused on resisting our mercantilist, racist, corporatocracy.

Numerous remarkably positive action points erupted from the reconvened charrette, to this effect:



### Do:

- Nurture leadership
- Be open to change
- Build relationships
- Strengthen local and self-governance
- Mediate with policy makers
- Foster creativity in all areas of life
- Build resilient systems
- Work effectively across systems
- Acquire assets to gain autonomy
- More micro than macro

### Don't:

- Try to do too much with too little
- Work too fast
- Work the jobs of other institutions

Certainly, since they are so frequently self-organised and cell-like, arts organisations operating on a comparable scale to Deveron Projects have played a key role in grass-roots community resilience. However, the question remains: how might they continue to organise their body politic when their established life-support systems are being switched off?

Contemporary art, as generally understood today, has only been around since the 1950s, and it would be folly to assume it will be around forever. There's plenty of evidence to suggest that it's transitioning into something else, not because it has exhausted its mission, (world domination), but because the paradigms that supported it, notably social constructivism, are now persistently

challenged. PRAKTIKA 2's dalliance with the anthropocene, mandatory mise en scene for every debate today, is a case in point. The anthropocene is, in part, an attempt to pull the rug under the anthropocentric tendencies that gave birth to contemporary art. Moreover, PRAKTIKA 2's consensus that creativity (rather than 'art') is empowering is an anthropological conception of art that, equally, runs counter to the increasingly professional world of contemporary art.

A related issue, then, revolved around what actually constitutes an arts organisation. David Harding, as convener of our feedback session, pointed out that arts organisations that have sustained themselves over many decades were frequently led by charismatic founding-directors. There is a great deal of truth in this. Many of the arts organisations we take for granted in Scotland were hard-won by individuals who devoted their lives to securing resources and support for their artistic vision. Equally, there are just as many arts organisations that are the legacy of carefully articulated, and equally Herculean structures and covenants. Is it only codified systems that prevail? Harding's legitimate concern was that the institutions led by charismatic directors would die off with their founders, leaving no estate, no legacy. This was a concern, however, that PRAKTIKA 2 did not appear to share in the case of Deveron Projects.

To understand why, we need only ask: what sort of institution is Deveron Projects? The 21st birthday celebrations that followed PRAKTIKA 2 were a persistent reminder that Deveron Projects is clearly Claudia Zieske's brainchild and exists primarily because she wanted to see and participate in the kind of activities it brings to Huntly. As Harding rightly said, Zieske's vision, perseverance and tenacity is largely what we must thank for the persistence of Deveron Projects. However, we need to remember that Deveron Projects is a user-generated institution rather than, say, an ARI (artist-run institution). This makes it unusual in relation to the dominant discourses and mythologies that truss Scotland's visual arts bodies. From the start, Deveron Projects has committed to an anthropological approach to culture and, in doing so, has demonstrated autonomist and commoning tendencies. The artist isn't any more, or less, at the centre of Deveron Projects' conception of the arts than are the communities and the fields within which they are enmeshed.

It is perhaps for this reason that Zieske has spent more time than most arts directors communicating and distributing the aspects of Deveron Projects can be modelled. With Dr Nuno Sacramento (Director of Peacock Arts, Aberdeen), Zieske co-authored ARTocracy (2010, [www.deveron-projects.com/about/artocracy](http://www.deveron-projects.com/about/artocracy)) a user-manual that "systematically explains how the creative process is applied through its layers of people, context, processes and results." ARTocracy has enabled a number of readers to establish their own town-venue arts projects. Deveron Projects, thus, is an artistic method, one that Zieske and Sacramento have done an unparalleled job of making explicit and transparent. In a union state wherein constitutionalism is uncoded, and thus highly opaque, ARTocracy's openness is a vital tonic.



Deveron Projects is akin to an Open Educational Resource (OER), one that imbues and facilitates the cyclical models developed in Participatory Action Research (PAR). Of course, OER and PAR sync neatly with the open aspirations of many artists with which Deveron Projects has worked; with the desire to do things with, not to, the community. This aspiration was clear at the 21st birthday celebrations when Councillor Hamish Vernalby, the Provost of Aberdeenshire, singled out Deveron Projects as an exemplar of how situated and socially engaged arts programmes could, and should, connect the local and the global.

As an artistic method, Deveron Projects here deploys a partial inversion. The gallery is an instrument upon which artists perform their different scores. Huntly - in its totality - is the instrument, Deveron Projects, the score. Where galleries are highly controlled environments, play-spaces with deliberately constrained parameters, Huntly is a flood of possibilities, a living, breathing life-form. This is why Deveron Projects cannot help but inculcate practices of agency and community that run counter to the personalised ontologies that still underwrite a great deal of contemporary art. This dynamic field explains why Deveron Projects can be both a score that can be collectively played, and remain generative and adaptive to its ever changing environment.

Deveron Projects' legacy, then, will be witnessed in the extent to which it is adopted and adapted as a model. Does this mean that Deveron Projects is a 'script'? As Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold have argued, there is 'no script for social and cultural life.' If this is true, it means that arts organisations cannot proceed from the position that they know what artistic practice is; they should be, rather, be motivated by aiding speculation on what it might be. Deveron Projects is an explicitly autopoietic structure, a network of processes that learns and regenerates itself. It adapts and recalibrates in ways that ensure its reproduction. As Deveron Projects and the ARTocracy model mature, its communities of practice will grow and spawn an increasingly complex conglomeration of customs and practices. If its manifest codifications become internalised and implicit, in the ways that studio-practice has, it may become our common culture.

In this sense, Deveron Projects' future would seem to be secure yet, necessarily, unpredictable. The fact that Deveron Arts has now changed its name to Deveron Projects is testimony to how, as an institution, it inherently embraces its need to shape-shift. If being an 'arts' organisation becomes a barrier to supporting the arts, then there is always an alternative.

*Neil Mulholland,  
Professor of Contemporary Art Practice and Theory,  
Edinburgh College of Art*



# The Gordon Arms

## *Birthday Party*

It's a venue where dull meetings are more often the norm and I have been to plenty, but of course this was Deveron Arts so I knew I could expect something different and definitely not dull. The occasion was the 21st birthday of the arts organisation and so the company of at least 100, from all over the world and the town of Huntly itself, spontaneously burst into song when Donald Boyd, Huntly and District Development Trust's manager suggested it.

People like myself with just a passing interest in the arts rubbed shoulders with artists. Old acquaintances were renewed as artists who had worked with Deveron Arts came back for this coming of age celebration. Like any party there was tea and not quite cake, shortbread, as Huntly is the home of renowned makers, Dean's. But there was no standing on ceremony or formality, in a scene which might have come from Huntly's past and steam mills on local farms, waitresses heaved big pots of tea and coffee round and poured into saucerless cups.

Like any 21st birthday party, there were speeches not from the great and the good but from people who truly admired and understood the work that Deveron Arts has done and the impact it has had on the community around Huntly. It was telling that Aberdeenshire's Provost Hamish Vernal suggested that the authority might want to copy some of Deveron Arts' work – what an accolade – but will they be as successful?

Creative Scotland's Amanda Catto gave warm praise of Deveron Arts. Jazques Coetzer came from South Africa to mastermind the celebration and spoke of his love for the town. Chairman Mary Bourne said how marvellous it was to have such an arts group on her doorstep so to speak. But unlike so many gatherings I had attended in the venue, none of the speeches were long – Deveron Arts' director Claudia Zeiske had instructed interns and staff that when a speaker reached their time limit they would don a scary mask, the signal that it was time to wind up their tribute – maybe Huntly should adopt this for more meetings.

The ultimate time up was sounded on the pipes and Steve Brown lead the procession on its way to the next part of the celebration.

*Pat Scott, The Huntly Express*

## ***Family Fringe Event***

The children's workshop and screening of Ben Macfayden's film of *The White Wood* was a charming synergy between art, intergenerational harmony, ecology and history. Deckchairs were dotted about, laden with blankets and cushions, setting the tone of warmth and a peaceful ambience. Filled with the aroma of Rhynie Woman's delicious warm cordials and the scent of the freshly clipped fir branches; the unassuming hall was transformed into an intimate, inviting natural den in which to watch and learn from the beautiful fairy-tale documentary about *The White Wood*.

The gentle voice of Ben Macfayden peacefully narrated the tale of the White Wood while children and their parents were given the space to be creative and engage with nature; inspired by the tranquil scenes of the film. Children created their own festive headdresses from the selection of clippings gathered from the woods; fir branches, holly and berries, which they glamorised with the addition of festive sparkles, feathers, tinsel and glittery oddities. Deveron Arts nurtured an effortless and magical space for children and their parents to engage with the White Wood in a creative and wholesome environment.

There is only one word that can quite capture the creative and charming atmosphere created at the event; the Dutch word 'gezellig.'

*Sophia Gore,  
Participant*

As part of the 21 Years of The Town is the Venue, an event and workshop was curated for the families and guests of all ages while the speeches took place at Gordon Arms Hotel.

We all found a comfortable spot on the deck chair or on the White Wood blankets on the floor and watched the film of artist Ben Mali Macfadyen telling the story of the White Wood. The story tells us about the wood in 400 years time when it has grown and children re-discover it, learning about the war as well as peace and the very creation of the wood and the earth on which they co-inhabit.

Not everyone's creativity can wait until the end of the screening and a painting, a white feather heart, invisibility cape and woodland crowns start appearing, all inspired by the story. After the screening the exploration into the White Wood project continues in conversations and by picking up the book about the project.

After this we are ready to go downstairs, join the rest of the guests and enjoy the meal prepared by Syrian new Scotts and celebrate human friendship.

*Linda Bolsakova,  
Project Assistant,  
Deveron Projects*





## ***The Same but Different***

The Linden Centre - a waiting place before swim club and a place that I associate with 20p Curlywurlys, 10p Freddos and 5p Bubblegum. A place where I spent many weird and wonderful summer schools. And a place that I haven't been to since my very first band's night. The space itself was no different (although the price of my tuck shop treats have doubled) - the walls, the pool table and the counter all the same. What was different was the waist high piles of flat bread, jars on jars of tahini and to see the place host 4 extremely friendly Syrian men (young and old) and a Palestinian man- all churning out falafels as if there were many more working bodies- not just 5. My task for the birthday party was to decorate the space and to help cook. After helpfully 'tasting' quite a few falafels, munching away at some raw mint leaves, and asking questions of Palestine, Syria, food and family over a couple of cups of tea I realised that although the cooks really wanted to feed me they really didn't need me. So I set to work on the hall that hasn't changed for years. A patchwork of African print, floral and checked cloths, together with some Christmas lights, mint, coriander, ivy and mistletoe flower decorations, a gimbri, a Moroccan musician, an incredible spread of falafel wraps, sweet basbousa cake, Ayran yoghurt drink, 4 chirpy but tired Syrians, 1 chirpy but tired Palestinian and lots of happy guests- I think The Linden Centre was delightfully the 'same, same but DIFFERENT'.

*Deborah May, Participant*





# The Gordon Arms

## *The Ceilidh*

It is a very particular place the Gordon Arms Hotel - you really have to go there to find out why. For now, imagine your way to the long room at the back all red walls and mirrors beneath a broad white ceiling dripping with silver garlands. Maybe 127 people are with you and at least four of them are fiddling away with gusto at the far end filling the air with flocks of notes that scatter over the walls with feckless abandon.

The space is no longer the ARTocracy it was two hours before, it has become a CEILIDHocracy (ruled by companions if you follow the gaelic) and it is strange the way this happens. More than mere booze there is a kind of reckless semaphore that waves abandon from eye to eye saying 'go on, let rip, you know you want to' and it is all but irresistible for a few small hours.

There are always a few whose role is to guard the bar and impart their wisdom on the state of the nation, or the arts council perhaps, and there is always flotsam and jetsam panting in the shallows at the edge, but the floor is always a maelstrom – a cavalcade of well-heeled hooves amongst which small boys sit serenely throwing paper darts at the grown-ups.

But soon, as in a Victorian fever comes the crisis, the word goes round that they're doing one more strip the willow. Impossible numbers of people squeeze onto no-mans-land for the ritual combat that in this case stretches from the stage easily 30 yards to the bar. And that's a lot of arms, and flying hair and grinning teeth and hooting and whirling and trying not to land on the cake or the small children before ending up dazed and confused in front of the guy who's still expounding on the state of the nation at the bar, with much cheese and laughter.

And then almost the best bit, after the necessary Auld Lang Syne and the impromptu what-not from the big guy in the kilt, there's the quiet at the end. The goodbyes and hugs and maybe just a cheeky one, and the decorations coming down and the last of the cake and then the best bit - the blessed cold air outside.

*Patrick Semple, Participant*